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ABSTRACT

This guide is to help teach about President Nixon's succession to office in 1969 and the ending of the war in Vietnam in 1973. The guide includes a background essay, suggsted activities, discussion questions, suggested readings, a list of key players from the era, vocabulary, a list of components and key events tied to "The New York Times" articles of the time period. (EH)

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Ending the War, 1969-1973: Educator's Guide. Live from the Past Series.

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Ending the War, 1969-1973

During the presidential election campaign of 1968, Richard M. Nixon reaped the political benefits of American discontent over the war in Vietnam. While protesters continued to attack the Democrats, Nixon shrewdly avoided definitive statements on Vietnam by merely suggesting that the United States should "end the war and win the peace." When Nixon entered the presidency in 1969, he still had not elaborated on his timetable for withdrawal but hinted he had a secret formula for peace. During his first year in office, Nixon slowly revealed portions of his plan. Part of his strategy consisted of a renewed bombing campaign coupled with a hard-line negotiation stand at the Paris peace talks. The other half of the plan involved gradual withdrawals of American forces from Vietnam while continuing the Vietnamization process, the training of South Vietnamese troops to take over the American combat role.

Nixon insisted on negotiating from a position of strength. Just two months after taking office, Nixon ordered American B-52s to bomb Communist military sanctuaries across the Vietnamese border in Cambodia's "Fishhook" region. When fourteen months of bombing failed to stop the flow of arms into South Vietnam, Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia to seize stockpiled weapons. Massive bombing raids on Cambodia, Laos and Hanoi, and the mining of North Vietnam harbors continued throughout 1972. Protest groups, outraged over the brutality of the bombing and Nixon's expansion of the war into neighboring countries, organized larger and more violent protest rallies. Conversely, Nixon's "silent majority" seemed less opposed to Nixon's strategy because the withdrawal of over 500,000 troops from Vietnam by the end of 1972 had dramatically decreased U.S. combat casualties. At the same time, the U.S. helped build the South Vietnamese army to more than a million troops.

Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's diplomatic strategy also paid dividends at the bargaining table. U.S. efforts to improve relations with China and the Soviet Union helped to weaken their support of North Vietnam. By August 1972, the North Vietnamese Politburo voted to abandon its demand for the removal of the South Vietnamese government as a prerequisite for a peace settlement. The South Vietnamese, though, opposed a cease-fire on any terms and objected to the U.S. agreement that North Vietnam could control territory captured from South Vietnam. Kissinger continued for several months to try to get North and South Vietnam to come to terms. When diplomatic methods proved fruitless, the U.S. resumed bombing of North Vietnam during the last two weeks of 1972 to force the North Vietnamese leadership to agree to South Vietnam's demands. The international community lambasted what became known as the "Christmas bombings." It is not clear why the U.S. decided to stop bombing or why the South Vietnamese agreed to the terms, but in January 1973, the three parties finally signed virtually the same agreement negotiated a few months before. America's longest war was over.

President Nixon, who took four years to end the war, proclaimed to the American public that "peace with honor" had been achieved. There was an immediate cease-fire and the North Vietnamese agreed to free several hundred American prisoners of war. The anti-Communist regime of South Vietnam remained in power, but the Vietcong forces also remained entrenched within the borders of the country they sought to conquer. Soon after the last American troops had withdrawn, the peace agreement was shattered and fighting erupted. In March 1975, North Vietnamese troops began their final offensive. By April 1975, the Communists took Saigon, renamed it Ho Chi Minh City, and reunited the country under one government. The staff of the American Embassy in Saigon fled the country in humiliation. After thirty years of fighting the French and then American forces, the Communists had reunified Vietnam under their rule.

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Suggested Activities

✻ *Direct students' attention to the poster page from* The New York Times, *which presents a chronology of events associated with the war in Vietnam. Ask students to identify the few events in this chronology which, in their opinion, were the turning points to large-scale involvement of the U.S. in this war. Finally, ask students to identify the few events in this chronology which, in their opinion, were the turning points to the outcome of the war.*

✻ *Ask students to research the Supreme Court case* The New York Times v. United States, *the so-called Pentagon Papers case. Have them identify the issue, analyze the contending arguments on the issue, identify the Court's decision, analyze the Court's reasons for its decision and assess the historical significance of the case. Why did Nixon fight so hard to prevent the papers from being published?*

✻ *Have students consider this quote from* The New York Times *article "U.S. Forces Out of Vietnam; Hanoi Frees the Last P.O.W.," by Joseph B. Treaster:*

> *Often when military men talk about the mistakes of the war, they conclude that more force should have been used. Many think that North Vietnam should have been invaded. Failing that, they would have preferred to march deep into Laos to try to cut the Ho Chi Minh supply network.*

Ask the students to evaluate this idea and apply it to the Johnson and Nixon administrations' war tactics and mindset.

✻ *After completing this unit, lead a discussion in which students assess the results of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Use the following quotes to stimulate discussion:*

> *"We were wrong, terribly wrong" to become involved in the Vietnam War. (Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara,* In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*)*
>
> *"This was a war about the balance of power in all of Southeast Asia. We lost the battle in Vietnam, but we won the war in Southeast Asia." (Walt Rostow, an adviser to President Lyndon Johnson, in* Time, *April 24, 1995, p. 45)*
>
> *We "must see this war in terms of the entire atmospherics of the Cold War." (*New York Times *reporter Robert B. Semple Jr. in the "Live From The Past" video)*

✻ *Have students read "Nixon Peace Plan Assailed By Reds at Talks in Paris" and then summarize the Communist point of view of the U.S. role in Vietnam. Do the students feel there are any legitimate points being made by the North Vietnamese? If so, what are they? What portions appear to be propaganda or negotiation posturing?*

Using the Components

Educator's Guide:

✻ Use the guide as a time-saving reference before a lecture or when preparing a lesson plan.

✻ Copy portions of the guide to hand out to students. If there is not enough time to cover the unit in detail, the introduction, vocabulary, list of players, or discussion questions can help students to grasp the concepts quickly.

Poster:

✻ Display the poster several days before beginning the unit to stimulate student inquiries and anticipation for the subject topic.

✻ Use the poster on the first day of the unit to foster an opening discussion to prime students for in-depth study or discussion later on in the unit.

✻ Punctuate an event's importance by using the poster only on the day the front page appeared chronologically in the order of events.

Video:

✻ Provide an overview of the events by showing the video at the beginning of the unit.

✻ Summarize the issues studied by showing the video at the end of the unit.

✻ Stimulate topics for independent research by displaying the video, and then direct the students to search among a variety of sources to narrow their own related topics.

Article Sheets:

✻ Select, copy and hand out only the articles best suited to fill the gaps in the textbook information or to help highlight the day's lecture topic.

✻ Copy all the article sheets into one packet and provide to the students as a research resource to answer questions, develop essays or to prepare presentations.

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Discussion Questions

1. Explain President Richard Nixon's policy of attempting to attain peace in Vietnam.
2. How did President Nixon's Vietnam policy differ from the policy of his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson? How was it similar?
3. What specific military and diplomatic strategies and tactics did President Nixon use to carry out his Vietnam policy?
4. How did President Nixon justify his policy to the public? How did different segments of society respond to Nixon's policies?
5. Why did President Nixon send combat forces to Cambodia? How was this move related to his Vietnam War policy?
6. How did President Nixon alternate between acts of aggression and conciliation in pursuit of his peace plan for Vietnam?
7. What was the controversy about the Pentagon Papers? How did it begin? How was it resolved? What did it reveal about public reactions to Nixon's Vietnam policy?
8. What did North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the United States hope to achieve at the Paris peace talks? What issues did the peace accord resolve?
9. To what extent did President Nixon achieve the goals of his Vietnam policy? Did he achieve "peace with honor"?
10. After the U.S. finally withdrew all its troops, what was the end result of the war in Vietnam? How would you assess the overall effectiveness of U.S. policy in Vietnam?

Suggested Reading

NIXON: A Life,
by Jonathan Aitken. Chicago: Regnery, 1994.

WAR AND RESPONSIBILITY: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and its Aftermath,
by John Hart Ely. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.

AMERICA'S LONGEST WAR: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975,
by George C. Herring. New York: Wiley, 1979.

NIXON RECONSIDERED,
by Joan Hoff. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

VIETNAM: A History,
by Stanley Karnow. New York: Viking, 1983.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE VIETNAM WAR,
by Stanley I. Kutler, ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

IN RETROSPECT: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,
by Robert S. McNamara. New York: Times Books, 1995.

THE PENTAGON PAPERS,
by The New York Times. New York: Bantam, 1971.

THE PAPERS AND THE PAPERS: An Account of the Legal Battles Over the Pentagon Papers,
by S. J. Unger. New York: Dutton, 1972.

The New York Times Live from the PAST

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List of Players

Creighton Abrams *U.S. general and commander in Vietnam.*

Ellsworth Bunker *U.S. Ambassador in South Vietnam from 1967-1973.*

Daniel Ellsberg *U.S. Defense Department official who provided, without authorization, copies of the "Pentagon Papers" to* The New York Times, *which published them in 1971.*

Ho Chi Minh *Founder of the Communist party of Vietnam and President of North Vietnam—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—from 1945 until his death in 1969.*

Henry Kissinger *National Security Advisor to President Richard Nixon and U.S. Secretary of State, 1973-1977.*

Melvin Laird *U.S. Defense Secretary under President Nixon.*

Le Duc Tho *North Vietnamese leader who negotiated with Henry Kissinger to achieve the cease-fire agreement of January 1973.*

Lon Nol *Cambodian general who seized power in 1970. Sought to push Vietnamese Communist troops out of Cambodia.*

Nguyen Van Thieu *President of South Vietnam from 1967-1975.*

William Rogers *U.S. Secretary of State during the first term of President Nixon.*

Vo Nguyen Giap *General and head of North Vietnamese armed forces, a formidable military leader.*

Ronald Ziegler *President Nixon's White House Press Secretary.*

VOCABULARY

B-52s
Largest of the American bombers used in the Vietnam War to attack North Vietnam.

CAMBODIA
An independent country on the eastern border of South Vietnam. Communist insurgents used eastern Cambodian territory as sanctuary.

HANOI
Capital of North Vietnam; reference to the Communist government.

INDOCHINA
The southeastern peninsula of Asia, which includes the countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, among others.

LAOS
An independent country bordering Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

PENTAGON
Five-sided building in Arlington, Virginia, that houses the U.S. Department of Defense.

PENTAGON PAPERS
A massive study of how and why the United States went to war in Vietnam. Parts were secretly leaked to *The New York Times* by Daniel Ellsberg.

PENTAGON PAPERS CASE
The Supreme Court case of *The New York Times Company v. United States*. The Supreme Court upheld *The Times's* right to publish the document.

SAIGON
Capital of South Vietnam; reference to the American-backed government.

PRIOR RESTRAINT
A form of censorship in which government officials prevent in advance a newspaper or magazine from publishing materials of which they disapprove.

VIETCONG
Popular name for the National Liberation Front, the Communist revolutionary force in South Vietnam.

VIETNAMIZATION
Policy of the U.S. military forces to develop the capacities of South Vietnam to defend itself without dependence on outside assistance.

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List of Components

(20) New York Times Articles

The article dates listed below represent the date *The New York Times* published the story and may differ from the dateline at the beginning of each story, which represents the day the article was filed. Some articles have been excerpted to conserve space.

"Nixon Has Begun Program to End War in Vietnam," April 6, 1969.

"Nixon Asks Troop Pullout in a Year and Would Join Vietnam Political Talks," May 15, 1969.

"President Hopes Pullout Will Top 200,000 Before '71," June 20, 1969.

"Nixon Asks Public to Give Him Time for Ending War," September 27, 1969.

"Nixon Calls for Public Support as He Pursues His Vietnam Plan on a Secret Pullout Timetable," November 4, 1969.

"Texts of Nixon and Ho Chi Minh Letters Last Summer," November 4, 1969.

"Nixon to Pull Out 150,000 From Vietnam Within Year," April 21, 1969.

"U.S. Aids Saigon Push in Cambodia With Planes, Artillery, Advisers; Move Stirs Opposition in Senate," April 30, 1970.

"Nixon Sends Combat Forces to Cambodia to Drive Communists From Staging Zone," May 1, 1970.

"Transcript of President's Address Offering New Proposals for Indochina Peace," October 8, 1970.

"Nixon Peace Plan Assailed by Reds at Talks in Paris," October 9, 1970.

"Nixon Sees Risk of Isolationism if Disengagement Is Too Swift; Soviet Scores His Vietnam Plan," February 26, 1971.

"Supreme Court, 6-3, Upholds Newspapers on Publication of the Pentagon Report; Times Resumes Its Series, Halted 15 Days," July 1, 1971.

"Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement," June 13, 1971.

"Paris Peace Talks Reopen With Hope on Secret Parley," April 28, 1972.

"Nixon Orders Enemy's Ports Mined; Says Materiel Will Be Denied Hanoi Until It Frees P.O.W.'s and Halts War," May 9, 1972.

"Vietnam Accord Is Reached; Cease-fire Begins Saturday; P.O.W.'s to Be Free in 60 Days," January 24, 1973.

"Vietnam Peace Pacts Signed; America's Longest War Halts," January 28, 1973.

"Highlights of Agreement," January 25, 1973.

"U.S. Forces Out of Vietnam; Hanoi Frees the Last P.O.W.," March 30, 1973.

(1) New York Times Front Page Poster

"Chronology of the War in Vietnam and Its Historical Antecedents From 1940," January 28, 1973.

(1) Video Program

Videotapes may not be reproduced and are limited solely and exclusively to single classroom exhibition.

Title: The War in Vietnam: Ending the War, 1969-1973.

Running Time: Approximately 16:08.

Contents: The video contains historical footage, still photos, background information and insightful commentary from interviews with *New York Times* associate editor, Robert B. Semple Jr., who covered the White House during President Nixon's first term.

Key Events

MAY 14, 1969

President Nixon proposes simultaneous withdrawal from South Vietnam of American and North Vietnamese forces.

NOVEMBER 3, 1969

Nixon delivers "silent majority" speech and calls for public support of his Vietnam policy.

APRIL 30, 1970

Nixon announces invasion of Cambodia.

OCTOBER 7-8, 1970

Nixon proposes policies of "standstill cease fire" and "mutual withdrawal."

JUNE 30, 1971

U.S. Supreme Court decides against the federal government's use of "prior restraint" in the Pentagon Papers case (The New York Times v. United States).

JANUARY 25, 1972

Nixon reveals eight-point peace plan and asks for POW release.

FEBRUARY 24, 1972

Hanoi walks out of peace talks to protest U.S. air raids on North Vietnam.

APRIL 27, 1972

Peace talks between representatives of the U.S. and North Vietnam resume in Paris, France.

MAY 8, 1972

Nixon announces mining of Haiphong Harbor and intensified bombing of North Vietnam.

JANUARY 27, 1973

Cease-fire agreement is signed.

MARCH 29, 1973

Last American troops leave South Vietnam.

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